

17

(Catukka) Sobhana Sutta

The (Fours) Discourse on the Beautiful | A 4.7/2:8
Theme: How a community is corrupted or beautified
Translated by Piya Tan ©2017

1 Introduction

1.1 BEAUTIFYING THE SANGHA

1.1.1 The (Catukka) Sobhana Sutta (A 4.7) essentially states that these 4 kinds of persons “beautifies the sangha” (*saṅgham sobhenti*), that is, a monk (*bhikkhu*), a nun (*bhikkhunī*), a layman (*upāsaka*) and a laywoman (*upāsikā*) who are “competent, disciplined, morally courageous, deeply learned, Dharma-bearers, who practise the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma.”

1.1.2 The qualities that beautify

1.1.2.1 According to the Sutta, the sangha is **beautified** (*sobhenti*) by our being “*competent, disciplined, morally courageous, deeply learned, Dharma-bearers, who practise the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma.*” From the Commentary (AA 3:7), we can define (especially for the first 3 qualities) and describe them as follows:

1.1.2.2 “Competent” (*vyattā*). This quality is rooted in wisdom. With knowledge (facts), we can *say* and *do* things; with wisdom we learn to say and do it *right and good*. Here, the disciple who beautifies the sangha is competent in his practice of the 3 trainings, that is, in moral virtue (keeping the precepts), in mental concentration (mindfulness and meditation), and insight wisdom (seeing true reality beginning with the universal nature of impermanence). [2.2.1]

1.1.2.3 “Disciplined” (*vinetā*). On a simple level, this quality applies to moral virtue (*sīla*), that is, our bodily actions and speech, which are timely and well-restrained. To be “disciplined” means that we are in control of our actions and speech, with which we are able to “remove” (*vineti*) negative states from within ourself,¹ and to “guide” (*vineti*) ourself away from unwholesome states.² [2.2.2]

1.1.2.4 “Morally courageous” (*visāradā*), or “self-confident,” that is, to be strengthened and moved by intrepidity or resolute courage (*vesārajja*)³ on account of faith, moral virtue, learning, energy and wisdom.⁴ The opposite is “moral timidity,” even “moral cowardice” (*sārajja*). The 5 qualities bringing about *timidity* are: lack of faith; immorality; lacking learning; laziness; and lack of wisdom, as explained in **the Sārajja Sutta** (A 5.101).⁵ [2.2.3]

¹ *Vineti*, “to remove, put away, give up.” Its pres part is *vinaya* (J 6:499) and abstract n, meaning “discipline”; pot 3 sg, *vinayetha* (Sn 361), *vineyya* (Sn 590); imperative *vinaya* (Sn 1098), *vinayassu* (Sn 559); ger *vineyya* (Sn 58). See PED: *vineti*.

² *Vineti*, “to lead, guide, instruct, train, educate”: inf *vineturā* (A 3:106); pot *vineyyam* + fut *vinessati* (S 4:105); aor *vinesi* (Miln 13); ger *vinayitvāna* (ThaA 69 ad Ap 5.10). See PED: *vineti*.

³ On *vesārajja*, see SD 28.9a (3).

⁴ **Sārajja S** (A 5.101/3:127), SD 28.9a(3).

⁵ A 5.101, SD 28.9a(3).

1.1.2.5 “Deeply learned” (*bahu-s,sutā*) refers specifically to a comprehensive understanding of the suttas and their teachings, and more broadly includes a good understanding of the Vinaya, too. While *wisdom* is already subsumed under our being “competent” [1.1.2.2], being “deeply learned” emphasizes on properly remembering the Dharma-Vinaya mainly for personal learning and practice. [2.2.4]

1.1.2.6 “Dharma-bearer” (*dhamma,dharā*) refers to one who is “deeply learned,” who is also skillful in teaching, discussing and answering queries on the Dharma. The Dharma-bearer, then, is a scriptural expert, who is a reliable source for their learning and practice of the Dharma. His knowledge is not merely theoretical, but matured with understanding through calm and insight of meditation, and the joy of lovingkindness.⁶ [2.2.5]

1.1.2.7 “Who practises the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma” (*dhammānudhamma,paṭipannā*), that is, to practise the Dhamma, in keeping with the Vinaya, as taught by the historical Buddha, in both the letter and the spirit.⁷ This is not so much religious training as it is spiritual education—bring out the best of one’s spirit—for the sake of self-understanding and self-liberation. This entails living a life with only the true Dharma as refuge,⁸ and a life that harmonizes with others and our environment, through the wisdom of universal impermanence.⁹ [2.2.6]

1.1.3 The beautifiers of the sangha

1.1.3.1 It is interesting **the (Catukka) Sobhana Sutta** uses the term *saṅgha*—usually used to refer to *the monastic community*—here in an inclusive sense to encompass the fourfold assembly of monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen. In other words, the term “sangha” (*saṅgha*) here is used in the broad sense of “assembly” (*parisā*).

Since the Sutta speaks only of wholesome virtues of those who would “beautify” the sangha, we can safely assume that this is the “noble community” (*ariya saṅgha*) that is meant. In the early Buddhist texts, the term *saṅgha* is only used in two ways, that is, as referring to the following:

- (1) the conventional community (*sammuti,saṅgha*)¹⁰ of ordained celibate and moneyless monastics; and
- (2) the noble community (*ariya,saṅgha*)¹¹ of saints of the path (the streamwinner, the once-returner and the non-returners) and the arhats (both monastic and lay). [3.1.2.2]

In the (Catukka) Sobhana Sutta, the term *saṅgha* refers to the “noble community,” which includes both monastics and the laity who are saints.

1.1.3.2 What does it mean to “beautify” (*sobheti*)¹² the sangha? We can see a similar usage in **the Mahā Go,siṅga Sutta** (M 32) where the potential verb, *sobheyya*, is used—where, on a beautiful full

⁶ For an example of this, see **(Anuruddhā) Upakkilesa S** (M 128,11-13/3:156 f), SD 5.18.

⁷ For related suttas, see **(Sotāpatti-y)Aṅga S** (S 55.50) SD 70.1(1); **(Sotāpatti) Phala S** (S 55.55,2 (4)) + SD 3.3(4.1) (2(4)); **Dhammānudhamma Patipanna S** (It 3.4.7) SD 73.1; see also SD 47.1 (2.1.1); SD 47.3a (3.2.1).

⁸ See **The one true refuge**, SD 3.1.

⁹ See **Listening beyond the ear**, SD 3.2.

¹⁰ This usage, however, is only noted in **Dve,mātikā,pāḷi** (the twin Pātimokkha; p2) and comys: KhpA 20; VvA 155.

¹¹ Seems to occur only near the end of **Dhammika S** (A 6.54/3:373,19*); but is very common in comys.

¹² *Sobheti* (A 4.7/2:8; Sn 421; J 1:43), caus of *sobhati*, “to shine, be splendid, look beautiful” (J 1:89, 2:93); pot or opt *sobheyya*, “should, would or will be illuminated/beautified (by)” (M 32/1:212-219 ×26: see §4.7 n; Miln 190; V 4:61).

moon night, Ānanda and some great arhats, each declare the kind of ideal monk by whom the forest “will be illuminated (or beautified).” Ānanda and the great arhats each declares the ideal monk to be as follows:

	M 32	
Ānanda:	§4.5	one who is learned;
Revata:	§5	one who delights in solitude;
Anuruddha:	§6	one who has the divine eye;
Mahā Kassapa:	§7	a forest-dweller, lives a strict ascetic life, and praises such qualities; ¹³
Mahā Moggallāna	§8	two monks engaged in Dharma discussion;
Sāriputta	§9	one who masters his mind;
The Buddha	§17	the monk who meditates and “establishes mindfulness before himself.”

(M 32/1:212-219), SD 44.12

1.1.3.3 From this teaching, we can deduce that, in the (Catukka) Sobhana Sutta, one “beautifies” (*sobheti*) the sangha by one’s wholesomely best quality, a quality by which the Buddha would declare to be the “foremost” (*etad-aggā*).¹⁴ On a simpler level, this means that we should practise the Dharma in keeping with the Dharma, and we will discover some special, even unique wholesome, quality that we have which comes into prominence on account of our Dharma practice.

1.1.4 The (Pañcaka) Sobhana Sutta (A 5.233)

The (Pañcaka) Sobhana Sutta (A 5.233) lists 5 qualities of a monastic that “beautifies the monastery” that he lives in. The meaning is that, ideally, every monastic renunciant should cultivate these 5 virtues: (1) moral virtue, (2) deep learning, (3) a good speaker, (4) well-versed in the Dharma, and (5) mastery of the dhyanas.

SD 51.17(1.1)

(Pañcaka) Sobhana Sutta

The (Fives) Discourse on Beauty • **A 5.233/3:262 f**

Traditional: **A 5.5.4.3** Āṅguttara Nikāya 5, Pañcaka Nipāta 5, Pañcama Paṇṇāsaka 4, Āvāsika Vagga 3

Theme: The 5 qualities of a monastic renunciant

1 Bhikshus, a resident monk who possesses **5 qualities** beautifies a monastery.¹⁵

What are the five?

(1) He is **morally virtuous**:¹⁶

he dwells restrained by the restraint of the Pāṭimokkha [the monastic code];¹⁷

he is accomplished in conduct and resort;

he sees danger in the slightest fault;

he trains himself by undertaking the training-rules.¹⁸

(2) He is **deeply learned**:

¹³ Mahā Kassapa lists 14 qualities, ending with who “is accomplished in the knowledge and vision of freedom,” ie, awakening, and praises such a quality.

¹⁴ On foremost disciples, see SD 43.4 (4.2.1). On laity as *etad-aggā*, see SD 8.6 (7).

¹⁵ *Pañcahi bhikkhave dhammehi samannāgato āvāsiko bhikkhu āvāsam sobheti*.

¹⁶ “Morally virtuous,” *sīlavā*. Cf **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2.43-62/1:63-69 @ SD 8.10): see §23 n on “conduct.”

¹⁷ On the Pāṭimokkha, see **Anubuddha Bhikkhu S** (S 47.3), SD 24.6a (2.2.1(1)).

¹⁸ As in **(Ti) Sikkhā S** (A 3.88/1:235), SD 24.10c. For a fuller def of the 3 higher trainings (*ti adhi, sikkhā*) in terms of the 4 types of saints, see **(Sekha) Uddesa S** (A 3.85/1:231 f), SD 3.3(2).

he remembers what he has learned,

builds up what he has learned [a master of learning, a store of learning].¹⁹

The teachings that are good in the beginning, good in the middle, good in the end,

both in the spirit and the letter [both in meaning and phrasing],

that declares the holy life fully complete and pure—

these are what he is deeply learned in,

he remembers, has mastered verbally,

examined them in his mind, and penetrated them rightly by view.²⁰

(3) He has a good voice, a good delivery, endowed with urbane speech, distinctly clear, not driveling [faultless in speech], able to clarify any issue.²¹

(4) He is able to instruct, inspire, rouse and gladden with a Dharma-talk those who approach him.²²

(5) He attains at will, without trouble, without difficulty, the 4 dhyanas that constitute the higher mind, an abiding that is pleasant here and now.²³

2 Bhikshus, a resident monk who possesses these 5 qualities beautifies the monastery.

— evaṃ —

The (Sāriputta) Nirodha Sutta (A 5.166) records the monk Upavaṇa as listing qualities 1, 2, 3, and 5 as being those of the elder Sāriputta. No 5. here forms Sāriputta's 4th quality, and his 5th quality is that of the destruction of the mental influxes, which makes him an arhat.²⁴ This 5th quality is not listed here. Clearly here, these qualities are those that are ideally to be cultivated by renunciants who live in a monastic residence (*āvāsa*).²⁵

2 The corruptors of an assembly

2.1 We have already mentioned something about the “beautifiers” of the sangha [1.1.3]. Here, we only need to extend the term, mutatis mutandis, to the “assembly” (*parisā*) of monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen.

¹⁹ From start to here: *Bahu-s, suto hoti suta, dharo suta, sannicayo*.

²⁰ This is stock: **Cv 4.14.19 @ V 2:95**; **Saṅgīti S** (33,3.3(1g)/3:268; **Sekha S** (M 53.14/1:356), SD 21.14; **Gopaka Moggallāna S** (M 108,15/3:11), SD 33.5; **Uruvela S 2** (A 4.22/2:23). Cf (**Ahitāya**) **Thera S** (A 5.88/3:114-116), SD 40a.16.

²¹ *Kalyāṇa, vāco hoti kalyāṇa, vāk. karaṇo poriyā vācāya samannāgato vissatṭhāya anelagalāya atthassa viññāpaniyā*. This is stock: **Caṅkī S** (M 95,8(6)/2:165 f: Caṅkī's quality, §9(7)/2:167: Buddha's quality), SD 21.15; **Khippa Nisanti S** (A 4.97/2:97 f×4); (**Pañcaka**) **Sīla, vanta S** (A 5.87/3:114); (**Sāriputta**) **Nirodha S** (A 5.166,39(3)/3:195); **Āvāsika S** (A 5.231/3:261 positively stated, 3:262 negatively stated); **Piya S** (A 5.232/3:262); **Ovāda S** (A 8.52/4:279); **Alaṃ S** (A 8.62/4:295-298×5); **Alaṃ S** (A 8.78/4:328+331); **Puṇṇiya S** (A 10.83/5:155×2). Cf variants: **Sobhana S** (A 5.232/3:261 +262); V 4:51, only *kalyāṇa, vāco hoti kalyāṇa, vākkaraṇo*.

²² *Paṭibalo hoti upasaṅkamante dhammiyā kathāya sandassetuṃ samādapetuṃ samuttejetuṃ sampahaṃsetuṃ*. On the key terms, see SD 40a.4 (1.2).

²³ *Catunnaṃ jhānaṇaṃ ābhicetasikānaṃ diṭṭha, dhamma, sukha, vihārānaṃ nikāma, lābhī hoti akiccha, lābhī akasira, lābhī*. On the 4 dhyanas, see **Dhyana**, SD 8.4; **The layman & dhyana**, SD 8.5. See also **Nimitta**, SD 19.7; **Samādhi**, SD 33.1a; **The Buddha discovered dhyana**, SD 33.1b.

²⁴ A 5.166/3:192-196 (SD 47.15).

²⁵ A “monastic residence” or simply “residence” (*āvāsa*) is located in a forested countryside, usu built and maintained by the monks themselves, while a “park” (*ārāma*), located near a village or town, within its own private enclosure, is looked after by the donor or lay supporters. (S Dutt, 1962:54-57)

2.2 The corruptors of the assembly are those who are spiritually incompetent, undisciplined, lacking moral courage, not learned, not Dharma-bearers, and practise the Dharma the wrong way. Let us briefly examine each of these negative qualities so that we work to understand them, correct them and prevent them. The idea of “**assembly**” (*parisā*) is that we are not alone, and our actions affect not only us, but also affects a significant number of others, even those whom we do not meet, or even posterity itself. How we act or do not act matters—we must understand the nature of our actions and our communal lives.

2.2.1 “Not (spiritually) competent”

2.2.1.1 This means that we lack wisdom, an understanding of what really matters in life and what to do about it. We may have a lot of knowledge and facts, with which we can *say* and *do* things, but we only use these as ways or weapons for attracting attention and defending our views. In other words, we crave for attention and are dependent on the crowd for our “meaningless” life.

2.2.1.2 But, with wisdom, we learn to say and do things *right and good*. To be spiritually incompetent means that we have no real control of our body or speech (no moral virtue); we lack control of our own mind (no mental concentration), and we lack wisdom: we are unable or unwilling to see true reality, especially the universal nature of impermanence. Hence, we are intoxicated with the notions of youth, health and life, yet fearing or unmindful that we will age, fall sick some day, and surely die one day.²⁶

2.2.2 “Undisciplined”

2.2.2.1 On a simple level, this means that we lack self-control. We are unable to remove our negative states or change our bad habits. We are but puppets whose strings are pulled and controlled by our unconscious or latent tendencies of lust, ill will and ignorance. Even in our daily lives, we are mostly motivated by greed, hate, delusion and fear. To lack discipline means to put our remote-control in the hands of others, the crowd or some outside agency that we think controls us.

2.2.2.2 To be disciplined, we need to get back our remote-control into our own hands and work for our own self-control and self-liberation. Once we get back our remote-control, we begin to see the clutter in our life, how greed, hate and delusion have crowded up our lives with more things to do and ever less time. But time is constant (if we follow clock time). It is how we value and use time that makes us perceive whether we have time or not. Once we clear up the clutter in our life, we find more space for growth and happiness—to actually see beauty in our life and beautify the lives of others.

2.2.3 “Lacking moral courage”

2.2.3.1 Our moral actions and attitude make a good society possible. It takes some moral courage to better this good society—to see it celebrating truth and beauty: we then beautify society. When we value truth and beauty, it only inspires us to see the best in ourself and in others. We then have a spacious community that is a fertile ground for the rise of true individuals (instead of uniform automatons). A true individual (*sappurisa*) is one who is truly morally courageous.²⁷

²⁶ See **Mada S** (A 3.39), SD 42.13.

²⁷ On the true individual, see **Sappurisa S** (M 113) SD 23.7; **Bāla Paṇḍita S** (M 129,27-50) SD 2.22.

2.2.3.2 Moral courage means the understanding and confidence that good always triumphs, sooner or later. Often, in wanting to effect good, we are put under great heat and pressure; we feel crushed and transformed by our desire for good—this is how diamonds arise in the earth’s bowels. To lack moral courage is to unreasonably and unwisely fear others, or what is different from us, or what we do not understand. We start getting rid of this unhelpful fear when we bravely seek to understand ourself: how we think and feel; to know our own mind and love our own heart. Then, we will know and love others, too—to beautify them.

2.2.4 “Not learned”

2.2.4.1 All our waking lives we are likely to be under the power of information and technology. We collect facts and consume technology without really understanding them, especially their long-term effects—or whether we need them at all. The first sign of learning is when we begin to notice how we, as society, are ourself consuming these facts and technology.

2.2.4.2 Ironically, we spend so much **time** with such outside things, with others, that we realize we really have very little or no time at all for ourself, for our own personal development and mental cultivation, for true happiness. Then, we learn that we must “let go” of things—that we grow best with **letting go**: first, of things we do not really need; second, avoiding what is toxic in things we consume and in people we associate with; third, we must let go of the past and the future. When we mindfully watch the present, we will be learning a great deal about ourself and life.²⁸

2.2.4.3 Society grows by learning from its past where helpful, and by letting go of the past that is unhelpful. When a community has more individuals who are morally courageous [2.2.3; 1.1.2.4], then, it is more likely to have a healthy culture. A **culture** that blindly clings to its past but does not understand its present, limits its own wholesome growth and opens itself up to unhealthy influences from other cultures and subcultures. **Good culture** preserves the past as valuable lessons for present growth and changes, and the potential for an even better future.

2.2.5 “Not a Dharma-bearer”

2.2.5.1 The Buddha Dharma provides us with tools for personal growth and spiritual transformation—those who truly benefit the community. When we treat the Dharma merely as facts (instead of tools for change), we wrongly see them as fixed ideas—the reality is that they seem to connect with what is seriously wrong in us. That is why, we are not happy when we think someone is trying to prove us wrong: we become defensive instead of being curious to learn. If others fall for the delusion that we are right, then, we are only encouraging a pathological community where facts are valued more than truth, and where people are treated as mere statistics.

2.2.5.2 To really know Dharma is to understand and accept that everything changes, especially our views. We have been changing our views all our life. It’s like being infatuated with a wrong and unhappy partner: we fail to see his faults and our weakness, until it is too late. When we understand change and growth, then, we also know that our views (ways of looking at things) will change as we mature in life. We also understand that people and communities change, too—and that we can make such changes wholesome.

²⁸ On letting go or true renunciation, see **Danta,bhūmi S** (M 125) SD 46.3; SD 46.15 (2.7.1.4); SD 66.13 (1). On

2.2.5.3 When we are Dharma experts—filled with wisdom and compassion—we will be truly happy and benefit a lot of people, even society itself. If we cannot be Dharma experts, then, at least, we must “hold” (*dhāreti*) some Dharma—the truth and beauty of true reality—in our life. Diligently learning the Dharma (especially from the suttas) is the basis for being able to hold it in our heart with compassion, so that our mind is calm and clear with wisdom. Only when we truly hold the truth, the Dharma, can we beautify others.

2.2.6 “Who practises the Dharma the wrong way”

2.2.6.1 Many of us know a lot *about* Buddhism—as facts—but do not practise it: we cannot practise “facts.” We can only defend them, quarrel with others over them, and make enemies with people we haven’t even yet known! In other words, we have not really practised the Dharma for what it really is—a method of personal transformation, the appreciation of inner truth and beauty, to beautify the community.

2.2.6.2 When we understand and accept **the Dharma as our one and only refuge**—as the Buddha himself does²⁹—then, we begin to understand the Dharma as we live it in our daily life. This understanding or wisdom keeps bringing out the best in us—the clearest truth and greatest beauty, the joy of life and beyond. We then begin to see for ourself what it means *to let go of the world*—just as we take in a breath, we have then to give it back again, every time. When we understand and accept that we can have nothing of this world, that we have to leave it all behind, and we happily do so; then, we begin to truly see nirvana.³⁰

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SD 51.17(2)

(Catukka) Parisā Sutta

The (Fours) Discourse on the Assembly • A 4.211/2:225 f

Traditional: A 4.5.2.1 Āṅguttara Nikāya 4, Catukka Nipāta, 5, Pañcaka Paṇṇāsaka 2, Parisā Vagga 1

Theme: The corruptors and the beautifiers of an assembly

1 Bhikshus, there are these 4 **that corrupt an assembly.** *parisa,dussanā*
What are the four?

- 2** Here, bhikshus,
- (1) a monk (*bhikkhu*) is immoral, bad in nature, a corruptor of the assembly;
 - (2) a nun (*bhikkhunī*) is immoral, bad in nature, a corruptor of the assembly;
 - (3) a layman (*upāsaka*) is immoral, bad in nature, a corruptor of the assembly;
 - (4) a laywoman (*upāsikā*) is immoral, bad in nature, a corruptor of the assembly.

These, bhikshus, are the 4 that corrupt an assembly.

3 Bhikshus, there are these 4 **that beautify an assembly.** *parisa,sobhanā*
What are the four?

meditation as renunciation, see **Hālidakāni S 1** (S 22.3/3:9-12) SD 10.12; **Bhāvanā**, SD 15.1 (14.7); **Sexuality**, SD 31.7 (1.6.2).

²⁹ See **Gāraṇa S** (S 6.2), SD 12.3.

³⁰ See **Nibbāna Paṭisaṃyutta S 1** (U 8.1), SD 50.1 esp (2.3).

4 Here bhikshus,

- (1) a monk is morally virtuous, good in nature, a beautifier of the assembly; [226]
- (2) a nun *is morally virtuous, good in nature, a beautifier of the assembly;*
- (3) a layman *is morally virtuous, good in nature, a beautifier of the assembly;*
- (4) a laywoman *is morally virtuous, good in nature, a beautifier of the assembly;*

These, bhikshus, are the 4 that beautify an assembly.

— evaṃ —

3 Related teachings

3.1 SANGHA AND ASSEMBLY

3.1.1 Sangha and assembly

While “**sangha**” (*saṅgha*), meaning a conventional monastic community, refers to the celibate and moneyless monastics (monks and nuns) who keep to the Vinaya, the term “**assembly**” (*parisā*) refers to the community of monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen as a whole, whether they are saints (those who have attained the path) or not.

3.1.2 The 2 pairs of sanghas

3.1.2.1 Then, there are the 2 kinds of **sangha** as “community,” that is, a monastic assembly, namely, that of the monks (*bhikkhu, saṅgha*) and of the nuns (*bhikkhunī, saṅgha*). Broadly, the duly admitted and ordained monks and nuns form their respective communities, that is, including their novices (*sāmaṇera* and *sāmaṇerī*)³¹ and, in the nuns’ case, the probationers (*sikkhāmānā*).³²

However, technically, *saṅgha* as a legal person—one that is empowered to perform formal acts (*saṅgha, kamma*), such as ordination, Pātimokkha recitals, and disciplining of community members—comprises only of the fully ordained monks and nuns in their respective communities. Novices and probationers are not part of such a legal person.

3.1.2.2 A more specialized usage of *saṅgha* differentiates those assembly members who have attained the path and those who have not. These are (1) the conventional sangha (*sammuti, saṅgha*) and (2) the noble sangha (*ariya, saṅgha*).

Technically, **the conventional sangha** is both the sangha as community and as legal person. In other words, this is the legal sangha, with *de jure* existence, that is, it is empowered to carry out formal ecclesiastical acts or as a legal entity [3.1.2.1].

The noble sangha, on the other hand, refers only to those members of the assembly—monastic or lay—who have attained the path of awakening. This *de facto* “sangha of the path” or community of saints comprises the streamwinners, the once-returners, the non-returners and the arhats. In significant ways, this is the full and true spiritual community of Buddhists, of those progressing on the path (streamwinners, once-returners and non-returners) or have reached its goal (the arhats).

³¹ A *sāmaṇera* is a male novice, as a rule, one who is under 20 years of age: see SD 45.16 (0.3). A *sāmaṇerī* or female novice is admitted in the same manner as the *sāmaṇera*—they both are under the 10 precepts (*dasa, sīla* or *dasa, sikkhāpada*, Khp 2/22-37): see SD 45.16 (0.3).

³² A *sikkhāmānā* or “female probationer” is a female novice who has completed the *sāmaṇerī* (female novice) stage, and is undergoing a 2-year probation before becoming a *bhikkhunī* (nun).

The spiritual significance of the noble sangha is highlighted by the fact that, technically, only a member of the noble sangha (monastic or lay) is known as a “male disciple” (*sāvaka*) or “female disciple” (*sāvikā*). Otherwise, the term “disciple” (*sāvaka*) is a common term for any member of such a noble community or assembly. Hence, they are also collectively known as “the sangha of disciples” (*sāvaka,-saṅgha*), which is the 3rd of the 3 jewels.³³

3.1.2.3 The broadest definition of the Buddhist *oikoumene* (or oecumene, the total community), is the conventional “community” (*parisā*), in their broadest sense, comprising of the monks and nuns—the sangha of “4 directions”—and of laymen and laywomen, whether they are saints or worldlings. Although this sounds like a modern concept, we can actually see its usage in **the Parisā Vagga** of the Aṅguttara [3.2].

3.2 THE PARISĀ VAGGA (A 2.5.1-10/1:70-76)

3.2.0.1 The Parisā Vagga (A 2.5.1-10)—the chapter on assemblies—comprises 10 suttas dealing with the unwholesome and the wholesome kinds of assemblies. Each of the suttas highlights a certain quality, the first negative and undesirable, the other positive and desirable. The term “assembly” (*parisā*) here, as we have noted [3.1.2.3], embraces the broadest sense of the Buddhist community. It is a community of monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen in their broadest sense.

3.2.0.2 Although all the 10 suttas specifically mention monks (*bhikkhu*)—such as (3.2.8) and (3.2.9)—insofar as the teaching concerns the Dharma, these suttas apply to **the whole community** of monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen in terms of Dharma living. The “monks” are specifically mentioned merely as exemplars, but the teachings are addressed to all who listen to these teachings or have access to them.³⁴

3.2.0.3 Here is a summary of 10 suttas of the Parisā Vagga, where each sutta lists 2 kinds of assemblies, the unwholesome and undesirable, and the wholesome and desirable, thus:

3.2.1 Parisā Sutta 1 (A 2.5.1/1:70) or Uttānā,gambhīrā Parisā Sutta

A shallow assembly (*uttānā parisā*) and a deep assembly (*gambhīrā parisā*).

A shallow assembly is “restless, haughty, vain, talkative, rambling in speech, muddled-headed, unclear in comprehension, unfocused, inattentive, unmindful and unrestrained faculties,” while a deep assembly is not.

3.2.2 Parisā Sutta 2 (A 2.5.2/1:70) or Vaggā,samaggā Parisā Sutta

A partisan assembly (*vaggā parisā*) and a harmonious assembly (*samaggā parisā*).

While the partisan assembly is quarrelsome and unfriendly, the harmonious assembly “dwell in concord, in mutual joy, without disputing, mixing like milk and water, looking at each other with kindly eyes.”

³³ On the “sangha of disciples” (*sāvaka,sangha*), see **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16,3.7-3.8), SD 9; also **Saṅghānussati**, SD 15.10a esp (1.0).

³⁴ On “monks” in the suttas as addressing all who are attending or listening (or have access to the teachings), see SD 4.9 (5.3); SD 13.1 (3.1.1).

3.2.3 Parisā Sutta 3 (A 2.5.3/1:70 f) or Aggānaggavatī Parisā Sutta

An inferior assembly (*anaggavatī parisā*) and a foremost assembly (*aggavatī parisā*).

3.2.3.1 In the inferior assembly, the elders are “luxurious, lax, leaders in backsliding; they shirk the task of spiritual solitude; they do not put forth effort to attain the unattained, to master the unmastered, to realize the unrealized.” Posterity follow their bad examples.

3.2.3.2 On the other hand, for the foremost assembly, the elders are “not luxurious, not lax; they reject backsliding, engaging in the task of spiritual solitude; they put forth effort to attain the unattained, to master the unmastered, to realize the unrealized.” The next generation follow their example.

3.2.4 Parisā Sutta 4 (A 2.5.4/1:71 f) or Ariyānariya Parisā Sutta

An ignoble assembly (*anariyā parisā*) and a noble assembly (*ariyā parisā*).

An ignoble assembly does not understand any of the 4 noble truths according to true reality. A noble assembly understand the 4 noble truths according to true reality.

3.2.5 Parisā Sutta 5 (A 2.5.5/1:72) or Parisā,kasaṭo,maṇḍo Sutta

The dregs of assemblies (*parisa,kasaṭo*) and the cream of assemblies (*parisa,maṇḍo*).

The dregs of assemblies comprise those who act unwholesomely on account of the biases of desire, hate, delusion or fear.³⁵

The cream of assemblies comprises those who do *not* act unwholesomely on account of the biases of desire, hate, delusion or fear.

3.2.6 Parisā Sutta 6 (A 2.5.6/1:72 f) or Ukkācīta,paṭipucchā,vinīta Parisā

An assembly trained in bombast (*ukkācīta,vinīta parisā*) and an assembly trained in interrogation (*paripucchā,vinīta parisā*).

This Sutta is expanded as the (Tika) Parisā Sutta 2 (A 3.132) [3.4].

3.2.7 Parisā Sutta 7 (A 2.5.7/1:73 f) or Amisa.garū,saddhamma.garū Parisā

An assembly that values worldliness (*āmisa,garū parisā*) and an assembly that values the true Dharma (*saddhamma,garū parisā*).

3.2.7.1 The monks of an assembly that value worldliness praise one another before the laity, saying,

“Monk so-and-so is one freed both ways;
so-and-so is wisdom-freed;
so-and-so is a body-witness;
so-and-so is a view-attainer;
so-and-so is one faith-freed;
so-and-so is a truth-follower;
so-and-so is a faith-follower;³⁶

*ubhato,bhāga vimutta
paññā,vimutta
kāya,sakkhī
diṭṭhi-p,patta
saddhā,vimutta
dhammānusārī
saddhānusārī*

³⁵ See **Bhatt’uddesaka S** (A 4.20,2), SD 89.10.

³⁶ The first 7 are disciples who have attained the path of awakening (*magga*) and fruits (*phala*), ie, they are saints of various levels. They are def in **Kīṭā,giti S** (M 70,14-21/1:477-479), SD 11.1; SD 10.16 (11.5.2).

so-and-so is morally virtuous and of good character; so-and-so is immoral and of bad character.” Thus, they receive gains, which they use them with attachment. Infatuated with them, they are blinded by them and fail to see their *danger*, and not understanding the escape from them.

3.2.7.2 The monks of an assembly that value the true Dharma do not advertise their attainments before the laity. When they receive gains, they use them without any attachment, seeing their danger, and understanding the escape from them.

3.2.8 Parisā Sutta 8 (A 2.5.8/1:74 f) or Visamā,samā Parisā Sutta

An uneven [contrarian] assembly (*visamā parisā*) and an even [conforming] assembly (*samā parisā*).

3.2.8.1 An uneven assembly is one that carries out formal acts (*kamma*) neither in keeping with the Dharma nor in keeping with the Vinaya. Acts contrary to the Dharma and to the Vinaya are explained, but acts in keeping with the Dharma and in keeping with the Vinaya are not explained.

3.2.8.2 An even assembly is one that carries out formal acts in keeping with the Dharma and in keeping with the Vinaya. Acts contrary to the Dharma and to the Vinaya are not explained, but acts in keeping with the Dharma and the Vinaya are explained.

3.2.9 Parisā Sutta 9 (A 2.5.9/1:75) or Dhammikādharmika Parisā Sutta

An unjust assembly (*addhammikā parisā*) and a just assembly (*dhammikā parisā*).

An unjust assembly acts in keeping with neither the Dharma nor Vinaya. It explains the unjust acts, but does not explain the just acts. [= 3.2.8.1]

A just assembly acts in keeping with the Dharma and with the Vinaya. It does not explain any unjust acts, but explains the just ones. [= 3.2.8.2]

3.2.10 Parisā Sutta 10 (A 2.5.10/1:75 f) or Dhammādhamma,vādinī Parisā Sutta

An assembly that speaks non-Dharma (*adhamma,vādinī parisā*), and an assembly that speaks what is Dharma (*dhamma,vādinī parisā*).

An assembly that speaks non-Dharma takes up a legal dispute (*adhikaraṇa*) whether it accords with the Dharma or not. Having done so, it is neither persuasive nor deliberative, and rejects any persuasion or deliberation, but clings to its opinion, and declaring that only it is right and all else wrong.

An assembly that speaks Dharma takes up a legal dispute only when it accords with the Dharma. Having done so, it persuades and deliberates, and allows persuasion and deliberation, and is willing to give up its opinion, neither clinging to it nor declaring everyone else to be wrong.

3.3 THE (TIKA) PARISĀ SUTTA 1 (A 3.93)

An assembly that is foremost (*aggavatī parisā*); a partisan assembly (*vaggā parisā*); and a harmonious assembly (*samaggā parisā*).

A foremost assembly: as in **Parisā Sutta 3** (A 2.5.3) [3.2.3.2].

A partisan assembly: as in **Parisā Sutta 2** (A 2.5.2) [3.2.2]

A harmonious assembly: as in **Parisā Sutta 2** (A 2.5.2) [3.2.2].

3.4 THE (TIKA) PARISĀ SUTTA 2 (A 3.132)

3.4.1 Expanded version. The 2 kinds of assemblies mentioned in the **(Duka) Parisā Sutta 6** (A 2.5.6) are expanded into the 3 kinds of assemblies in the very short (Tiks) Parisā Sutta 2 (A 3.132), thus:

SD 51.17(3.4)**(Tika) Parisā Sutta 2**

Dutiya (Tika) Parisā Sutta The Second (Threes) Discourse on Assemblies •

A 3.132/1:285 [A:B 3.134]

Traditional: **A 3.3.4.2** Aṅguttara Nikāya 3, Tika Nipāta 3, Tatiya Paṇṇāsaka 4, Yodh'ājīva Vagga 2

Theme: The 3 kinds of assemblies in terms of training

- 1 Bhikshus, there are these 3 kinds of assemblies. What are the three?
- 2 THE 3 KINDS OF ASSEMBLY
- (1) An assembly trained in bombast. *ukkâcita,vinītā parisā* [3.4.2.1]
- (2) An assembly trained in interrogation. *paripucchā,vinītā parisā* [3.4.2.2]
- (3) An assembly trained to the limits. *yāvatā,vinītā parisā*³⁷ [3.4.2.3-3.4.2.5]
- 3 These, bhikshus, are the 3 kinds of assemblies.

— evaṃ —

3.4.2 Commentary

3.4.2.1 The first 2 kinds of assemblies are the subject of **the (Duka) Parisā Sutta 6** (A 2.5.6), where each is explained in some detail [3.2.6]. This Sutta (A 2.5.6) describes an assembly “trained in bombast” (*ukkâcita,vinītā parisā*) as follows:

- (1) ... when the discourses spoken by the Tathagata,
 profound,³⁸ deep in meaning,³⁹ supramundane,⁴⁰ connected with emptiness,⁴¹ are being spoken,
 they have no desire to listen to them, they do not lend their ears to them,
 they do not apply their minds to understand them, and
 will not think that these teachings should be studied and mastered.
- (2) But when those discourses that are poetry [worldly writings] composed by poets [writers],⁴²
 beautiful in word and phrase, composed by outsiders,⁴³ spoken by their disciples,

³⁷ Be *yāvatā,vinītā-*; Ce *yāvatāva,vinītā-*; Ee Se *yāvat'ajjhā,vinītā-*. Comy: Trained in terms of measuring (others), meaning persons trained after one has known ways of measuring (others) (*pamāṇa,vasena vinītā, pamāṇanī ñatvā vinītā,parisā'ti attho*). Comy also lists the variant **yāvatajjhā**, which is explained as “an assembly trained after one has known (the nature of) personal inclinations, meaning as far as (one can read) inclinations” (*yāva ajjhāsayaṭi attho, ajjhāsayaṃ ñatvā vinītā,parisāti vuttarā hoti*) (AA 2:380).

³⁸ “Profound,” *gambhīra*, ie by way of its texts (*pāli,vāseṇa*) like **Salla S** (Sn 3.8) or **Sallekha S** (M 8) (SA 2:229).

³⁹ “Deep in meaning,” *gambhīr'attha*, like **Mahā Vedalla S** (M 43) (SA 2:229).

⁴⁰ “Supramundane,” *lok'uttara*, ie pointing to the supramundane goal (SA 2:229).

⁴¹ “Connected with emptiness,” *suññatā,paṭisaṃyutta*, ie explaining only the nature of beings as empty, as in the **Saṅkhitta Saṃyutta** [untraced, prob **Asaṅkhata Saṃyutta**] (SA 2:229). See §7n.

⁴² “Thinkers [poets and scholars],” *kavī*, usu tr as “poets,” but here has a general connotation or synecdoche for worldly thinkers and writers, incl academic scholars. **Kavī S** (A 4.230) speaks of 4 kinds of *kavī*: one who writes or composes a work after thinking (*cintā,kavī*), one who composes a work after listening (to talks, legends, myths,

are being spoken, they will desire to listen to them, they will lend their ears to them,
they will apply their minds to understand them, and
they will think that these teachings should be studied and mastered.

= (**Āṇi Sutta**, S 20.7,5+6.1), SD 11.13

(3) And having learned these teachings, they neither interrogate one another about them,
nor examine them thoroughly, asking, “How is this? What is the meaning of this?”

They *neither* reveal what has not been revealed, *nor* clarify to him what is not clear, *nor*
remove doubts from the many things that give rise to doubt.⁴⁴

(Cf **Pāpaṇika S 2**, A 3.20,13), SD 37.2b

3.4.2.2 The (Duka) Parisā Sutta 6 (A 2.5.6) then describes an assembly “trained in interrogation”
(*paṭipucchā,vinīta parisā*) as follows (with cross-references to their recurrences in other suttas):

... when those discourses that are poetry [worldly writings] composed by poets [writers],
beautiful in word and phrase, composed by outsiders, spoken by their disciples,
are being spoken, they do not desire to listen to them, they *do not* lend their ears to them,
they *will not* apply their minds to understand them, and
will not think that these teachings should be studied and mastered. [cf 3.4.2.1(2)]

= (**Āṇi Sutta**, S 20.7,7), SD 11.13

But when *the discourses spoken by the Tathagata*,

profound, deep in meaning, supramundane, connected with emptiness, are being spoken,

they desire to listen to them, they lend their ears to them,

they apply their minds to understand them, and

they think that these teachings should be studied and mastered.⁴⁵ [cf 3.4.2.1(1)]

= (**Āṇi Sutta**, S 20.7,6.1), SD 11.13

And having learned these teachings, they do interrogate one another about them,

they examine them thoroughly, asking, “How is this? What is the meaning of this?”

They reveal what has not been revealed, and clarify to him what is not clear,

and remove doubts from the many things that give rise to doubt.⁴⁶ [cf 3.4.2.1(3)]

= (**Pāpaṇika Sutta 2**, A 3.20,13), SD 37.2b

Interestingly, **the Pāpaṇika Sutta 2** (A 3.20,13) refers to this section that recurs in **the (Duka) Parisā 6** as dealing with being “accomplished in tutelage” (*nissaya,sampanna*), that is, *the 5-year basic training* that is mandatory for all monastics.⁴⁷ Even beyond this 5-year tutelage, an interest and openness in learning is vital for the progress of any monastic, indeed, any unawakened Buddhist.

3.4.2.3 The (Tika) Parisā Sutta 2 (A 3.132) lists the foremost of the 3 assemblies as “an assembly trained to the limits” (*yāvata,vinīta parisā*), that is, one comprising those who are being trained and have been trained to their fullest potential. During the early years of the Buddha’s ministry—especially during

etc) (*suta,kavī*), one who writes relying on the meanings of things (*attha,kavī*), and one who uses his own creative ideas, like the elder Vaṅgīsa (*paṭibhāna,kavī*) (A 4.230/2:230; AA 3:211; DA 1:95). See Intro.

⁴³ “Outsiders,” *bahirakā*, ie those outside the Dharma-Vinaya (SA 2:229).

⁴⁴ This section recurs in **Pāpaṇika S 2** (A 3.20,12.2+13.1), SD 37.2b. See full positive counterpart for nn & refs [3.4.2.2].

⁴⁵ Those whole para is the positive counterpart of **Āṇi Sutta** (S 20.7,5), SD 11.13.

⁴⁶ This section recurs in **Pāpaṇika S 2** (A 3.20,12.2+13.1), SD 37.2b.

⁴⁷ On the 5-year tutelage (or dependence) (*nissaya*), see SD 40a.8 (4.2.2.3).

the first decade—all those accepted into the monastic order are **arhats**—except for Ānanda, who is still a streamwinner, but nevertheless not an “outsider” (*bāhiraka*), since he is a saint of the path.

These arhats are those who are “disciplined to the limits” (*yāvatā,vinīta*), that is, fully disciplined in terms of the Dharma and the Vinaya. They are morally virtuous to the fullest sense of the term. There is no more training for them; hence, they are called “non-learners” (*asekha*) or adepts. Besides them are the “learners” (*sekha*), that is, those still walking the path of awakening—the streamwinners, the once-returners and the non-returners. Those who are neither adepts nor learners—who have not reached the path—are “outsiders” (*bāhiraka*).⁴⁸

3.4.2.4 The outsiders are, of course, worldlings (those still caught up with worldliness), especially the “blind worldlings” (*andha,puthujjana*), those who do not keep even the 5 precepts.⁴⁹ Then, there are the “hopeful” outsiders, that is, the “good worldlings” (*kalyāṇa puthujjana*), who do keep the precepts.⁵⁰ Keeping the precepts alone, however, only serves as the karmic basis conducive for heavenly rebirth. Moral virtue along with a constant mindfulness or reflection of impermanence assures even the lay person the attaining of the path as a streamwinner in this life itself.⁵¹

3.4.2.5 The suttas often record the Buddha as admonishing the good worldlings and those who have in some way benefitted from the Dharma, to diligently work for “progressively higher distinction” (*ulāraṃ pubbenāparaṃ visesaṃ*), that is, to at least attain dhyana (*jhāna*), or even any of the 4 stages of sainthood.⁵² As long as they have not attained arhathood, the Buddha declares to them that “there is here something more to be done” (*atthi c’ev’ettha uttariṃ karaṇīyaṃ*).⁵³ In short, the Buddha wants to be sure that they will benefit to the full limit or extent of the training and the path.

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(Catukka) Sobhana Sutta The (Fours) Discourse on the Beautiful

A 4.7

1 Bhikshus, there are these 4 kinds of persons—
competent,
disciplined,
morally courageous,
deeply learned,
Dharma-bearers,

vyattā
vinītā
visāradā
bahu-s,sutā
dhamma,dharā

⁴⁸ On the outsider (*bāhiraka*), see SD 10.16 (1.2.3.2).

⁴⁹ On the 5 precepts (*pañca,sīla*), see **Veḷu,dvāreyya S** (S 55.7) SD 1.5 (2); **Sīlānussati**, SD 15.11 (2.2); SD 21.6 (1.2); SD 37.8 (2.2). For refs, see DEB: sīla 5.

⁵⁰ On the worldling (*puthujjana*), see SD 19.1 (7.1) Who is a “Buddhist”?; also see SD 5.4 (3).

⁵¹ See **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

⁵² For def, see SD 50.5 (5.2.3.3). See also **Dhamma,cetiya S** (M 89,12+18) SD 64.10; **Bhikkhuṇī Vāsaka S** (S 47.3+10) SD 24.2; **Ānāpāna,sati S** (M 118,2 +6) SD 7.13. As *ulāraṃ visesaṃ*, only in **(Sāla,vatikā) Lohicca S** (D 12 passim), SD 34.8.

⁵³ See **(Ānanda) Subha S** (D 10,1.31+passim), SD 40a.13; **Sevitabbasevitabba S** (M 114) SD 39.8 (1.1.1.8); **(Gaha,-pati) Potaliya S** (M 54,14) SD 43.8.

who practise the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma— *dhammânudhamma,paṭipannā*
 who beautify the sangha.⁵⁴ *saṅghaṃ sobhenti*
 What are the four?

- (1) **A monk**, bhikshus,
 who is competent, disciplined, morally courageous,
deeply learned, Dharma-bearer,
who practises the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma, beautifies the sangha.
- (2) **A nun**, bhikshus,
 who is *competent, disciplined, morally courageous,*
deeply learned, Dharma-bearer,
who practises the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma, beautifies the sangha.
- (3) **A layman**, bhikshus,
 who is *competent, disciplined, morally courageous,*
deeply learned, Dharma-bearer,
who practises the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma, beautifies the sangha.
- (4) **A laywoman**, bhikshus,
 who is *competent, disciplined, morally courageous,*
deeply learned, Dharma-bearer,
who practises the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma, beautifies the sangha.

- 2** *Yo hoti vyatto ca visārado ca bahu-s,suto dhamma,dhara ca hoti dhammassa hoti anudhamma,cārī sa tādiso vuccati saṅgha,sobhano* Who is competent and morally courageous, wide in learning, and expert in Dharma, who lives the Dharma following the Dharma— such a one is said to beautify the sangha.
- 3** *bhikkhu ca sīla,sampanno bhikkhunī ca bahu-s,sutā upāsako ca yo saddho yā ca saddhā upāsikā ete kho saṅghaṃ sobhenti ete hi saṅgha,sobhanā'ti.* And a monk endowed with moral virtue, a nun who is deep in learning, a layman who is faithful, and a laywoman who is faithful, too— these indeed beautify the sangha, for, they are the beauty of the sangha.

— evaṃ —

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⁵⁴ *Cattāro'me bhikkhave vyattā vinītā visāradā bahu-s,sutā dhamma,dharā dhammânudhamma,paṭipannā saṅghaṃ sobhenti.*